

72 THE DIPLOMATIC BACKGROUND OF 1914

Iswolsky, who succeeded Lamsdorff as Russian Foreign Minister in 1906. After wearisome negotiations lasting more than a year, an Anglo-Russian Convention was signed on August 31, 1907. Unlike the Anglo-French settlement of 1904, the whole slate was not cleaned, neither the Far East nor the Near East being included. This mattered little, for in the former sphere Russia had for the time ceased to count, and in the latter the interests of other states were involved. The chief source of friction was the Middle East, where the security of India had to be kept in view. Three countries lay between Russia and India, namely Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet. Persia was by far the most important, and here Russia's predominant position was ungrudgingly recognized. The country was divided into a large Russian zone in the north, a small British zone on the Indian frontier, and an extensive neutral belt. To balance this substantial sacrifice we secured the elimination of Russian influence from Afghanistan and Tibet. The settlement was denounced as a needless surrender by Curzon and a few other Russophobes, but its main purpose was achieved. The Indian frontier had been safeguarded, and a formidable rival had been turned into a potential friend. A Russo-Japanese agreement negotiated by Iswolsky at the same time eased the situation still further.

With the return of confidence a new spirit began to emerge. Nicholas had expressed his wish for a visit from King Edward at the end of 1905, and in April 1908 he renewed the invitation. Two months later the King and Queen steamed into Reval, where they were cordially received. Grey's pledge to the House of Commons that there should be no fresh agreements was faithfully observed, yet the visit was scarcely less important than the memorable sojourn in Paris

in 1903. The heart of the conversations between Hardinge, the representative of the Foreign Office, and Iswolsky was the plea of the former that, in view of the growth of the German fleet, Russia should increase her armed strength in Europe. Though the German Ambassador in London was assured that nothing particular had happened, the foundations of a working partnership were laid, and the Kaiser's complaint of encirclement in an emotional speech to his officers showed that he sensed the atmospheric change. Henceforth, though sharp disagreements were to arise in Persia, the two Governments harmonized their policy in an increasing degree. The *Entente Cordial** with France had widened into a Triple Entente, as